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THOUGHTS ON THE  
WAR

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BY  
GILBERT MURRAY

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THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF NEW-YORK  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME

By JOHN B. HOGAN, Esq.  
OF NEW-YORK.  
IN TWO VOLUMES.  
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## THOUGHTS ON THE WAR<sup>1</sup>

I. 'NOT much news : Great Britain has declared war on Austria.' The words fell quite simply, and with no intention of irony, from the lips of a friend of mine who picked up the newspaper on the day when I began to write down these thoughts, August 13. So amazingly had the world changed since the 4th. And it has changed even more by the time when I revise the proofs.

During the month of July and earlier, English politics were by no means dull. For my own part, my mind was profoundly occupied with a number of public questions and causes : the whole maintenance of law and democratic government seemed to be threatened, not to speak of social reform and the great self-redeeming movements of the working class. In the forefront came anxiety for Home Rule and the Parliament Act, and a growing indignation against various classes of 'wreckers' ; those reactionaries who seemed to be playing with rebellion, playing with militarism, recklessly inflaming the party spirit of minorities so as to make parliamentary government impossible ; those revolutionaries who were openly preaching the Class

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted, by kind permission of the editor, from *The Hibbert Journal* for October, 1914.

War and urging the working man to mistrust his own leaders and representatives and believe in nothing but some helpless gospel of hate.

And now that is all swept away. We think no more of our great causes, and we think no more of our mutual hatreds. Good and evil come together. Our higher ideals are forgotten, but we are a band of brothers standing side by side.

This is a great thing. The fine instinctive generosity with which the House of Commons, from Mr. Bonar Law to Mr. Redmond, rose to the crisis has spread an impulse over the country. There is a bond of fellowship between Englishmen who before had no meeting-ground. In time past I have sometimes envied the working men who can simply hail a stranger as 'mate': we dons and men of letters seem in ordinary times to have no 'mates' and no gift for getting them. But the ice between man and man is broken now.

I think, too, that the feeling between different classes must have softened. Rich business men, whom I can remember a short time ago tediously eloquent on the vices of trades unionists and of the working classes in general, are now instantly and without hesitation making large sacrifices and facing heavy risks to see that as few men as possible shall be thrown out of work, and that no women and children shall starve. And working men who have not money to give are giving more than money, and giving it without question or grudge. Thank God, we did not hate each other as much as we imagined; or else, while the hatred was real enough on the surface, at the back of our minds we loved each other more.

And the band of brothers is greater and wider than any of us dared to believe. Many English hearts must

have swelled with almost incredulous gratitude to hear of the messages and the gifts which come flooding in from all the dominions overseas : the gold, the grain, the sugar, the tobacco ; its special produce coming from each State, and from all of them throngs of young men offering their strength and their life-blood. And India above all ! One who has cared much about India and has friends among Indian Nationalists cannot read with dry eyes the messages that come from all races and creeds of India, from Hindu and Moslem societies, from princes and holy men and even political exiles. . . . We have not always been sympathetic in our government of India ; we have not always been wise. But we have tried to be just ; and we have given to India the best work of our best men. It would have been hard on us if India had shown no loyalty at all ; but she has given us more than we deserved, more than we should have dared to claim. Neither Indian nor Englishman can forget it.

II. And there is something else. Travellers who have returned from France or Belgium—or Germany for that matter—tell us of the unhesitating heroism with which the ordinary men and women are giving themselves to the cause of their nation. A friend of mine heard the words of one Frenchwoman to another who was seeing her husband's train off to the front : '*Ne pleurez pas, il vous voit encore.*' When he was out of sight the tears might come ! . . . Not thousands but millions of women are saying words like that to themselves, and millions of men going out to face death.

We in England have not yet been put to the same test as France and Belgium. We are in the flush of our first emotion ; we have not yet had our nerves shaken by advancing armies, or our endurance ground

down by financial distress. But, as far as I can judge of the feelings of people whom I meet, they seem to me to be ready to answer any call that comes. We ask for 200,000 recruits and receive 300,000, for half a million and we receive three-quarters. We ask for more still, and the recruiting offices are overflowing. They cannot cope with the crowds of young men who cheerfully wait their turn at the office doors or on the pavement, while fierce old gentlemen continue to scold them in the newspapers. Certainly we are a quaint people.

And in the field ! A non-combatant stands humbled before the wonderful story of the retreat from Mons—the gallantry, the splendid skill, the mutual confidence of all ranks, the absolute faithfulness. One hardly dares praise such deeds ; one admires them in silence. And it is not the worshippers of war who have done this ; it is we, the good-natured, un-militarist, ultra-liberal people, the nation of humanitarians and shopkeepers.

Our army, indeed, is a professional army. What the French and the Belgians have done is an even more significant fact for civilization. It shows that the cultured, progressive, easy-living, peace-loving nations of Western Europe are not corrupted, at least as far as courage goes. The world has just seen them, bourgeois and working men, clerks, schoolmasters, musicians, grocers, ready in a moment when the call came ; able to march and fight for long days of scorching sun or icy rain ; willing, if need be, to die for their homes and countries, with no panic, no softening of the fibre . . . resolute to face death and to kill.

III. For there is that side of it too. We have now not only to strain every nerve to help our friend—we must strain every nerve also to injure our enemy.



This is horrible, but we must try to face the truth. For my own part, I find that I do desperately desire to hear of German dreadnoughts sunk in the North Sea. Mines are treacherous engines of death; but I should be only too glad to help in laying a mine for them. When I see one day that 20,000 Germans have been killed in such-and-such an engagement, and next day that it was only 2,000, I am sorry.

That is where we are. We are fighting for that which we love, whatever we call it. It is the Right, but it is something even more than the Right. For our lives, for England, for the liberty of Western Europe, for the possibility of peace and friendship between nations; for something which we should rather die than lose. And lose it we shall unless we can beat the Germans.

IV. Yet I have scarcely met a single person who seems to hate the Germans. We abominate their dishonest Government, their unscrupulous and arrogant diplomacy, the whole spirit of 'blood-and-iron' ambition which seems to have spread from Prussia through a great part of the nation. But not the people in general. They too, by whatever criminal folly they were led into war, are fighting now for what they call 'the Right'. For their lives and homes and their national pride, for that strange 'Culture', that idol of blood and clay and true gold, which they have built up with so many tears. They have been trebly deceived: deceived by their Government, deceived by their own idolatry, deceived by their sheer terror. They are ringed about by enemies; their one ally is broken; they hear the thunder of Cossack hoofs in the east coming ever closer; and hordes of stupid moujiks behind them, innumerable, clumsy, barbarous, as they imagine in their shuddering dread, treading down the



beloved Fatherland as they come. . . . What do Germans care for punctilios and neutrality treaties in the face of such a horror as that ?

No : we cannot hate or blame the people in general. And certainly not the individual Germans whom we know. I have just by me a letter from young Fritz Hackmann, who was in Oxford last term and brought me an introduction from a Greek scholar in Berlin : a charming letter, full of gratitude for the very small friendlinesses I had been able to show him. I remember his sunny smile and his bow with a click of the heels. He is now fighting us. . . . And there is Paul Maass, too, a young Doctor of Philosophy, recently married. He sent me a short time back the photograph of his baby, Ulf, and we exchanged small jokes about Ulf's look of wisdom and his knowledge of Greek and his imperious habits. And now of course Maass is with his regiment, and we shall do our best to kill him, and after that to starve Ulf and Ulf's mother.

It is well for us to remember what war means when reduced to terms of private human life. Doubtless we have most of us met disagreeable Germans and been angry with them ; but I doubt if we ever wanted to cut their throats or blow them to pieces with lyddite. And many thousands of us have German friends, or have come across good straight Germans in business, or have carried on smiling and incompetent conversations with kindly German peasants on walking tours. We must remember such things as these, and not hate the Germans.

' A little later it may be different. In a few weeks English and Germans will have done each other cruel and irreparable wrongs. The blood of those we love will lie between us. We shall hear stories of horrible

suffering. Atrocities will be committed by a few bad or stupid people on both sides, and will be published and distorted and magnified. It will be hard to avoid hatred then ; so it is well to try to think things out while our minds are still clear, while we still hate the war and not the enemy.'

So I wrote three weeks ago. By the time I revise these lines the prophecy has been more than fulfilled. No one had anticipated then that the nightmare doctrines of Bismarck and Nietzsche and Bernhardi would be actually enforced by official orders. 'Cause to non-combatants the maximum of suffering: leave the women and children nothing but their eyes to weep with. . . .' We thought they said these things just to startle and shock us ; and it now appears that some of them meant what they said. . . . Still we must not hate the German people. Who knows how many secret acts of mercy, mercy at risk of life and against orders, were done at Louvain and Dinant ? Germans are not demons ; they are naturally fine and good people. And they will wake from their evil dream.

V. 'Never again !' I see that a well-known imperialist writes to the papers saying that these words should be embroidered on the kit-bags of the Royal Navy and painted on the knapsacks of all our soldiers. The aspiration is perhaps too bold, for 'Never' is a very large word ; but I believe it is the real aspiration of most civilized men, certainly of most Englishmen. We are fighting for our national life, for our ideals of freedom and honest government and fair dealing between nations : but most men, if asked what they would like to attain at the end of this war, if it is successful, would probably agree in their answer. We seek no territory, no aggrandizement, no revenge ;

we only want to be safe from the recurrence of this present horror. We want permanent peace for Europe and freedom for each nation.

What is the way to attain it? The writer whom I have quoted goes on: 'The war must not end until German warships are sunk, her fortresses razed to the ground, her army disbanded, her munitions destroyed, and the military and civil bureaucrats responsible for opening hell gates are shot or exiled.' As if that would bring us any nearer to a permanent peace! Crushing Germany would do no good. It would point straight towards a war of revenge. It is not Germany, it is a system, that needs crushing. Other nations before Germany have menaced the peace of Europe, and other nations will do so again after Germany, if the system remains the same.

VI. It is interesting to look back at the records of the Congress of Vienna in 1815, at the end of the last great war of allied Europe against a military despotism.

It was hoped then, a standard historian tells us, 'that so great an opportunity would not be lost, but that the statesmen would initiate such measures of international disarmament as would perpetuate the blessings of that peace which Europe was enjoying after twenty years of warfare'. Certain Powers wished to use the occasion for crushing and humiliating France; but fortunately they did not carry the Congress with them. Talleyrand persuaded the Congress to accept the view that the recent wars had not been wars of nations, but of principles. It had not been Austria, Russia, Prussia, England, against France; it had been the principle of legitimacy against all that was illegitimate, treaty-breaking, revolution, usurpation. Bona-

partism was to be destroyed ; France was not to be injured.

Castlereagh, the English representative, concentrated his efforts upon two great objects. The first, which he just failed to obtain, owing chiefly to difficulties about Turkey, was a really effective and fully armed Concert of Europe. He wished for a united guarantee from all the Powers that they would accept the settlement made by the Congress and would, in future, wage collective war against the first breaker of the peace. The second object, which he succeeded in gaining, was, curiously enough, an international declaration of the abolition of the slave trade.

The principle of legitimacy—of ordinary law and right and custom—as against lawless ambition : a concert of Powers pledged by collective treaty to maintain and enforce peace ; and the abolition of the slave trade ! It sounds like the scheme of some new Utopia, and it was really a main part of the political programme of the leaders of the Congress of Vienna—of Castlereagh, Metternich, Talleyrand, Alexander of Russia, and Frederick William of Prussia. . . . They are not names to rouse enthusiasm nowadays. All except Talleyrand were confessed enemies of freedom and enlightenment and almost everything that we regard as progressive ; and Talleyrand, though occasionally on the right side in such matters, was not a person to inspire confidence. Yet, after all, they were more or less reasonable human beings, and a bitter experience had educated them. Doubtless they blundered ; they went on all kinds of wrong principles ; they based their partition of Europe on what they called ' legitimacy ', a perfectly artificial and false legitimacy, rather than nationality ; they loathed and dreaded popular movements ; they could

not quite keep their hands from a certain amount of picking and stealing. Yet, on the whole, we find these men at the end of the Great War fixing their minds not on glory and prestige and revenge, not on conventions and shams, but on ideals so great and true and humane and simple that most Englishmen in ordinary life are ashamed of mentioning them; trying hard to make peace permanent on the basis of what was recognized as 'legitimate' or fair; and, amid many differences, agreeing at least in the universal abolition of the slave trade.

VII. Our next conference of Europe ought to do far better if only we can be sure that it will meet in the same high spirit. Instead of Castlereagh, we shall send from England some one like Mr. Asquith or Sir Edward Grey, with ten times more progressive and liberal feeling and ten times more insight and understanding. Even suppose we send a Conservative, Mr. Balfour or Lord Lansdowne, the advance upon Castlereagh will be almost as great. Instead of Talleyrand, France will send one of her many able republican leaders, from Clémenceau to Delcassé, certainly more honest and humane than Talleyrand. And Germany, who can say? Except that it may be some one very different from these militarist schemers who have brought their country to ruin. In any case it is likely to be a wiser man than Frederick William, just as Russia is bound to send a wiser man than Alexander.

And behind these representatives there will be a deeper and far more intelligent feeling in the various peoples. In 1815 the nations were sick of war after long fighting. I doubt if there was any widespread conviction that war was in itself an abomination and an outrage on humanity. Philosophers felt it, some

inarticulate women and peasants and workmen felt it. But now such a feeling is almost universal. It commands a majority in any third-class railway carriage ; it is expressed almost as a matter of course in the average newspaper.

Between Waterloo and the present day there has passed one of the greatest and most swiftly progressive centuries of all human history, and the heart of Europe is really changed. I do not say we shall not have Jingo crowds or that our own hearts will not thrill with the various emotions of war, whether base or noble. But there is a change. Ideas that once belonged to a few philosophers have sunk into common men's minds ; Tolstoy has taught us, the intimate records of modern wars have taught us, free intercourse with foreigners has educated us, even the illustrated papers have made us realize things. In 1914 it is not that we happen to be sick of war ; it is that we mean to extirpate war out of the normal possibilities of civilized life, as we have extirpated leprosy and typhus.

VIII. What kind of settlement can we hope to attain at the end of it all ?

The question is still far off, and may have assumed astonishingly different shapes by the time we reach it, but it is perhaps well to try, now while we are calm and unhurt, to think out what we would most desire.

First of all, no revenge, no deliberate humiliation of any enemy, no picking and stealing.

Next, a drastic resettlement of all those burning problems which carry in them the seeds of European war, especially the problems of territory. Many of the details will be very difficult ; some may prove insoluble. But in general we must try to arrange, even at considerable cost, that territory goes with nationality. The



annexation of Alsace-Lorraine has disturbed the west of Europe for forty years ; the wrong distributions of territory in the Balkan peninsula have kept the spark of war constantly alive in the East, and have not been fully corrected by the last Balkan settlement. Every nation which sees a slice of itself cut off and held under foreign rule is a danger to peace, and so is every nation that holds by force or fraud an alien province. At this moment, if Austria had not annexed some millions of Servians in Bosnia and Herzegovina she would have no mortal quarrel with Servia. Any drastic rearrangement of this sort will probably involve the break-up of Austria, a larger Italy, a larger Servia, a larger Germany—for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, of Danish Schleswig, and the Polish provinces would be more than compensated by the accession of the Germanic parts of Austria—and a larger Russia. But it is not big nations that are a menace to peace ; it is nations with a grievance or nations who know that others have a grievance against them.

And shall we try again to achieve Castlereagh's and Alexander's ideal of a permanent Concert, pledged to make collective war upon the peace-breaker ? Surely we must. We must at all costs and in spite of all difficulties, because the alternative means such unspeakable failure. We must learn to agree, we civilized nations of Europe, or else we must perish. I believe that the chief counsel of wisdom here is to be sure to go far enough. We need a permanent Concert, perhaps a permanent Common Council, in which every awkward problem can be dealt with before it has time to grow dangerous, and in which outvoted minorities must accustom themselves to giving way. If we examine the failures of the European Concert in recent years



we shall find them generally due to two large causes. Either some Powers came into the council with unclean hands, determined to grab alien territory or fatally compromised because they had grabbed it in the past; or else they met too late, when the air was full of mistrust, and not to yield had become a point of honour. Once make certain of good faith and a clean start, and surely there is in the great Powers of Europe sufficient unity of view and feeling about fundamental matters to make it possible for them to work honestly together—at any rate, when the alternative is stark ruin. . . . It is well to remember that in this matter, from Alexander I onward, Russia has steadily done her best to lead the way.

And the abolition of the slave trade! It is wonderful to think that that was not only talked about but really achieved; the greatest abomination in the world definitely killed, finished and buried, never to return, as a result of the meeting of the Powers at the end of the Great War. What can we hope for to equal that? The limitation of armaments seems almost small in comparison.

We saw in the first week of the war what a nation and a government can do when the need or the opportunity comes. Armies and fleets mobilized, war risks assured, railways taken over, prices fixed . . . things that seemed almost impossible accomplished successfully in a few days. One sentence in Mr. Lloyd George's speech on the financial situation ran thus, if I remember the words: 'This part of the subject presents some peculiar difficulties, but I have no doubt they will be surmounted with the utmost ease.' That is the spirit in which our Government has risen to its crisis, a spirit not of shallow optimism but of that active and hard

thinking confidence which creates its own fulfilment. The power of man over circumstance is now—even now in the midst of this one terrific failure—immeasurably greater than it has ever yet been in history. Every year that passes has shown its increase. When the next settling day comes the real will of reasonable man should be able to assert itself and achieve its end with a completeness not conceivable in 1815.

IX. This is not the time to make any definite proposals. Civilization has still many slave trades to abolish. The trade in armaments is perhaps the most oppressive of all, but there are others also, slave trades social and intimate and international; no one can tell yet which ones and how many it may be possible to overthrow. But there is one thing that we must see. This war and the national aspiration behind the war must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the militarists. I do not say that we must not be ready for some form of universal service: that will depend on the circumstances in which the war leaves us. But we must not be militarized in mind and feeling; we must keep our politics British and not Prussian. That is the danger. It is the danger in every war. In time of war every interest, every passion, tends to be concentrated on the mere fighting, the gaining of advantages, the persistent use of cunning and force. An atmosphere tends to grow up in which the militarist and the schemer are at home and the liberal and democrat homeless.

There are many thousands of social reformers and radicals in this country who instinctively loathe war, and have only been convinced with the utmost reluctance, if at all, of the necessity of our fighting. The danger is that these people, containing among them some of our best guides and most helpful political

thinkers, may from disgust and discouragement fall into the background and leave public opinion to the mercy of our own von Tirpitzes and Bernhardis. That would be the last culminating disaster. It would mean that the war had ceased to be a war for free Europe against militarism, and had become merely one of the ordinary sordid and bloody struggles of nation against nation, one link in the insane chain of wrongs that lead ever to worse wrongs.

One may well be thankful that the strongest of the neutral Powers is guided by a leader so wise and upright and temperate as President Wilson. One may be thankful, too, that both here and in France we have in power not only a very able Ministry but a strongly liberal and peace-loving Ministry. In the first place, it unites the country far more effectively than any ministry which could be suspected of Jingoism. In the second place, it gives us a chance of a permanent settlement, based on wisdom and not on ambition. It is fortunate also that in Russia the more liberal elements in the Government seem to be predominant. Some English liberals seem to be sorry and half ashamed that we have Russia as an ally; for my own part I am glad and proud. Not only because of her splendid military achievements, but because, so far as I can read the signs of such things, there is in Russia, more than in other nations, a vast untapped reservoir of spiritual power, of idealism, of striving for a nobler life. And that is what Europe will most need at the end of this bitter material struggle. I am proud to think that the liberal and progressive elements in Russia are looking towards England and feeling strengthened by English friendship. 'This is for us,' said a great Russian liberal to me some days ago,

'this is for us a *Befreiungskrieg* (war of liberation). After this, reaction is impossible.' We are fighting not only to defend Russian governors and Russian peasants against German invasion, but also, and perhaps even more profoundly, to enable the Russia of Turgenieff and Tolstoy, the Russia of many artists and many martyrs, to work out its destiny and its freedom. If the true Russia has a powerful voice in the final settlement it will be a great thing for humanity.

Of course, all these hopes may be shattered and made ridiculous before the settlement comes. They would be shattered, probably, by a German victory; not because Germans are wicked, but because a German victory at the present time would mean a victory for blood-and-iron. They would be shattered, certainly, if in each separate country the liberal forces abandoned the situation to the reactionaries, and stood aside while the nation fell into that embitterment and brutalization of feeling which is the natural consequence of a long war.

To prevent the first of these perils is the work of our armies and navies; to prevent the second should be the work of all thoughtful non-combatants. It may be a difficult task, but at least it is not hideous; and some of the work that we must do is. So hideous, indeed, that at times it seems strange that we can carry it out at all—this war of civilized men against civilized men, against our intellectual teachers, our brothers in art and science and healing medicine, and so large a part of all that makes life beautiful. When we remember all this it makes us feel lost and heavy-hearted, like men struggling and unable to move in an evil dream. . . . So, it seems, for the time being we must forget it. We modern men are accustomed by the needs of life to

this division of feelings. In every war, in every competition almost, there is something of the same difficulty, and we have learned to keep the two sides of our mind apart. We must fight our hardest, indomitably, gallantly, even joyously, forgetting all else while we have to fight. When the fight is over we must remember.